

What's New

[Environment](#)[History & Culture](#)[Geography](#)[Pollution](#)[Careers & Business](#)[Q & A](#)[Links](#)[Calendar](#)[Glossary](#)[Home](#)

Water levels on the Great Lakes

Water levels are part of the ebb and flow of nature.

The difference between the amount of water coming into a lake and the amount going out is the determining factor in whether the water level will rise, fall or remain stable. When several months of above-average [precipitation](#) occur with cooler, cloudy conditions that cause less [evaporation](#), the levels gradually rise. Likewise, prolonged periods of lower-than-average precipitation and warmer temperatures typically result in lowering of water levels.



The recent decline of Great Lakes' water levels, now at lows not seen since the mid-1960s, is due mostly to evaporation during the warmer-than-usual temperatures of the past three years, a series of mild winters, and below-average [snowpack](#) in the Lake Superior basin.

Because the major factors affecting the water supply to the lakes--precipitation, evaporation and [runoff](#)--cannot be controlled or accurately predicted for more than a few weeks into the future, the influence of man-made regulation of lake levels is very limited. Nature has most of the control, adding water through snow and rain, and taking it away through evaporation.

Graphic: Lake Superior's south shore, April 2000.

Detailed Map: [The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River system](#)

Table of Contents

[Three types of water level fluctuations](#)

[History repeating itself: Hydrographs illustrate historical levels](#)

[How levels and flows are measured](#)

[Effects of lake level fluctuations](#)

[References and more information](#)

1 | [2](#) | [3](#) | [4](#) | [5](#) | [6](#) ►

[What's New](#) | [Environment](#) | [History & Culture](#) | [Geography](#) | [Pollution](#) | [Careers & Business](#)
[Questions & Answers](#) | [Education Links](#) | [Calendar of Events](#) | [Glossary](#) | [Home](#)

[TEACH Great Lakes](#)

Webmaster: [Jonathon D. Colman](#), jcolman@glc.org

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Last modified: August 01, 2002

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